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Word Order in the Aramaic of Daniel

by

Edward M. Cook



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Edward M. Cook
University of California, Los Angeles

The word order of Biblical Aramaic has been insufficiently and inadequately studied. Accurate figures are a desideratum, as well as careful attention to the *function* of word order in the language. New statistics on the kinds of word order present in the Aramaic of the book of Daniel are presented here and an attempt is made to examine the roles of word order in the verbal clause. There are two obligatory VO constructions: when *himmōn* is used as the 3rd person masculine plural suffix, and when a sentential complement is introduced by the particle *dī*. Further, and significantly, word order plays a role in differentiating tenses in the suffix-conjugation. In general, the results of the study indicate that the absence of case endings in the Aramaic of Daniel has not led to any rigidification of word order to avoid ambiguity. While far from being arbitrary, the order of the words is specialized in different contexts to serve a variety of functions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Much of the previous research on the Aramaic of Daniel and thus on its word order is oriented toward the determination of its place among the dialects of Old and Imperial Aramaic. The question of the date of the book's composition has exercised in this field a strong influence; in several studies the discussion of the language of Daniel comes under the rubric of "internal evidence" for the late (or early) dating of the book.

Word order statistics have been employed in this task. The numbers, or percentages, of constructions (Subject-Verb-Object, Verb-Subject-Object, and the like) that are considered to be typical of a certain dialect or period have been calculated and compared with a like set of numbers from Biblical Aramaic (hereinafter BA), and the results—so it is assumed—will point to a certain time or place of origin for the writings in BA.

This is a valid concern, but as far as word order is concerned, it has led generally to the aggregation of statistics and a few isolated observations—some useful from a linguistic standpoint, some not. Two considerations make a new study of the word order necessary:

1. Quite simply, the statistics collected thus far have not been dependable. The only two comprehensive sets of figures that I am aware of are those of W. Baumgartner (1927: 129-130) and R.H. Charles (1929: xliii, cvii). Baumgartner's study of the Aramaic of Daniel (hereinafter DA) is fundamental, but his figures are admittedly approximate. Charles's method of reckoning is open to serious question; he includes finite verbs with accusative pronominal suffixes in his count of VO constructions. But since the position of suffixes is governed by the morphological rules of affixation, not by any syntactical or functional constraints, Charles's figures are unusable.

To demonstrate the problem, I give here a comparative chart of the two sets of figures.

	SV	OV	VO	VS
Baumgartner	120	80	70	.80
Charles	208	120	c.237*	

*Charles considers VO and VS together.

2. Statistics are of limited usefulness if the syntactic and functional constraints on word order are unclear or unknown. It does no good to demonstrate that a language has more, say, VO type sentences than OV, if one cannot show why this is so. Why did the writers or speakers select that word order rather than another? Is there something in the grammar of the language "telling" them to use one word order rather than another? Do the particles they are using, or the verbs, or the position of the sentence in the discourse determine the word order? Does the mood of the speaker, or the kind of information to be conveyed, have an effect on the assignment of words to their positions? Until questions like these are posed, and an attempt made at answering them, the bare statistics can provide only the most general information.

Aside from the above statistics, most grammars of BA have dealt with word order in a rather impressionistic way. The main points of the discussions may be summarized as follows:

Most agree that BA word order is "free." Rosenthal writes (1974: 56): "The position of words in a verbal sentence is free and does not follow any hard and fast rules." Bauer and Leander add: "Kann der Akkusativ in allen Fallen dem Verbum folgen oder ihm vorangehen, ohne da in letzteren Falle eine besondere Hervorhebung beabsichtigt zu sein bracht" (1927: 339).

Other scholars emphasize that this free word order is typical of Eastern Aramaic, an observation stressed in particular by E. Y. Kutscher (1952). Baumgartner, in his article cited above, argued that the Aramaic of Daniel was late, but that no dialectal traits of East or West could be detected. H.H. Rowley (1929), although he did not deal with word order, came to the same conclusion. But Kutscher proposed that there was evidence for a dialectal assignment of BA according to syntactic isoglosses, including word

order. He noted that the “free” position of the object—either pre- or post-verbal—was characteristic of the Late Eastern dialects, such as Syriac and Mandaic. In the Western dialects, however, the object almost always comes after the verb (1952: 126). In his study of the Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran, Kutscher reiterated that “B.A. shows indications of Eastern origin,” based, among other things, on the free word order; he differentiates Qumran Aramaic from BA on that basis (1957:2, 34-35; see also Kutscher, 1971: 361-382).

The discussion of specific word orders has not been neglected in the literature. Bauer and Leander note that Verb-Subject-Object, although the typically “Semitic” word order, is no longer the rule in BA. “Immerhin ist die Stellung VS in Bibl.-aram. noch ganz lebendig und in gewissen ausschliessliche Regel. . . . Häufiger ist indes zweifellos die Voranstellung des Subjekts” (1927: 342). Rosenthal says, “The more ancient sequence *verb-subject-object* occurs occasionally, in particular in dependent clauses and after such particles as *kʿan* ‘now,’ *bēdayin* ‘then.’ . . . In sentences containing no direct object the preferred sequence is *subject-verb*. Other combinations are possible” (1974: 56). Segert also notes that, in Official Aramaic, the verb is placed predominantly after the subject, “wenn aber das Objekt vorangestellt werden soll, folgt ihm meist das Verb, und das Subjekt steht erst nach diesem” (1975: 422). (Perhaps this is what Rosenthal means by the otherwise puzzling and misleading remark, “Preference is shown to the sequence *object-verb-subject*” [1974: 56].) The object, Segert continues, mostly stands before the verb, even when the subject precedes it; any ambiguity resulting from this free word order is eliminated by the use of the *nota accusativi yat* and the preposition *k* (1975: 422).

The only survey on sentence types containing all three major constituents—Subject, Verb, and Object—is Bauer and Leander’s. The authors list the six possible combinations and cite examples from BA of each kind. No frequencies are given, but SVO is said to appear most frequently, then SOV, and OSV most rarely (1927: 342). My figures below bear this out.

Such is the general state of research on BA word order. The following essay will attempt to place the discussion on a firmer statistical basis and to carry the research into unexplored areas. It will be divided into two parts: (1) Presentation of exact figures, or as nearly exact as possible, for the occurrence and distribution of kinds of word order in the verbal clauses in Daniel; (2) Suggestions for syntactic and functional rules which condition word order in DA. The study will be limited to Daniel, since I make the assumption it is a continuous homogeneous text written (presumably) in the same dialect throughout, whereas the Aramaic of Ezra may be earlier, and thus not conditioned by the same rules. Occasionally the Aramaic of Ezra may be cited if it seems to exemplify the same phenomena as DA.

Some remarks on methodology: I have omitted the stereotyped phrase *ʾānē wāʾamar* (“he answered and said”), the common form for introducing direct discourse, and its variations, since its frequency and invariable form would tend to bias the figures. This omission is presupposed in all of the figures contained in the article.

The figures were arrived at by three different ways. Every verbal sentence was charted on sheets of accounting paper, with the verb appearing in an invariable column, so that the relations of object and subject to the verb would appear obvious. The figures arrived at by this method were checked by an independent count of the Aramaic text without referral to the charted sentences, and checked again by counting the verbs as registered in the Aramaic section of Solomon Mandelkern’s *Concordance*.

Verbal clauses only are studied, and in the verbal clauses the stress is on the reciprocal positions of Verb (V) and Object (O). “Verbal clause” is defined as a clause whose predicate contains a finite verb, i.e., a verb in the perfect tense (suffix-conjugation) or imperfect tense (prefix-conjugation). Since in BA the participle seems to be used occasionally as a finite verb (Rosenthal 1974: 55) the instances of a participle governing a direct object are included in the statistics and ensuing discussion. *Major constituents* are Verb, Subject, and Object. *Minor constituents* or *adjuncts* are prepositional phrases, adverbial expressions, and the like.

In the transcriptions which follow, the spirantization of *bgdkpt* is not indicated. Vowels are transcribed as long (e.g., *ā*), short (*a*), or very short (*ā*). Vocal shewa is transcribed as a raised *ʿ*. Defective and plene orthography are not indicated.

2. THE STATISTICS

There are, according to my count, 521 finite verbs in the Aramaic section of Daniel (Dan. chap. 2:4-chap. 7). Of course, not all of them have subjects or objects with them. Broken down by chapter, the following are the totals for the major word order arrangements:

CHAPTERS	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
VO	32	20	13	13	19	6	103
OV	29	2	17	17	7	12	84
SV	27	18	24	21	28	25	143
VS	8	6	11	13	11	9	58

Participles are more difficult to enumerate, since they partake of the nature of both verb and noun. Is a Subject + Participle construction a nominal sentence or a verbal sentence? Those participles that one may judiciously assume to be fulfilling a finite verb function break down numerically as follows (specific references are found further on in the article):

CHAPTERS	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
VO	7	4	1	1	3	4	20
OV	2	-	2	2	-	-	6
SV	8	3	1	7	2	8	29
VS	3	4	3	2	1	1	14

When totals for the finite verbs and participles are added, the results are as follows: VO—123, OV—90, SV—172, VS—72.

In sentences containing all three major constituents, the statistics are these (total without participles are in parentheses):

CHAPTERS	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
SVO	5(2)	5(4)	1(1)	5(4)	4(3)	4(1)	24(15)
SOV	4(3)	-	1(1)	2(2)	-	-	7(6)
VSO	2(1)	1(1)	2(2)	1(1)	-	-	6(5)
QVS	1(1)	-	1(1)	-	-	-	2(2)
OSV	1(-)	-	-	-	-	-	1(-)
VOS	1(1)	1(1)	-	-	-	1(1)	3(3)

Several conclusions are apparent from these raw figures: (1) The observation that SV is the preferred order of Verb and Subject is shown to be correct. (2) Bauer and Leander's observations on the six configurations of the three major constituents are accurate. (3) Although VO sentences are statistically more frequent, the proportion is not high enough to warrant a conclusion that VO is the "normal" word order.

Uninterpreted figures, of course, are singularly unhelpful. In the balance of the article I will attempt to offer some interpretations of phenomena that appear to constrain particular word orders, and afterwards, make some general comments that will put the bare figures in clearer perspective.

3. OBLIGATORY V-O CONSTRUCTIONS

a. The Third Person Masculine Plural Pronoun

Bauer and Leander (1927: 70) and Rosenthal (1974: 19, 54) note that the third masculine plural independent pronoun *himmōn* is used as the direct object form of the third masculine plural suffix, for which a specialized suffix form does not appear in BA. Bauer and Leander also remark (1927: 343) that the usual order of nuclear constituents, when *himmōn* is the object, is VOS (Dan. 2:34, 35; 3: 22; see also Ezra 5: 14). This word order is otherwise unused. For VO constructions with *himmō(n)*, see Ezra 4: 10, 23; 5: 12(twice), 15; 7:17. No OV types occur with *himmō(n)*. Therefore, although Bauer and Leander believe that it is “zufällig” that *himmōn*, in contrast to the other 3 m.pl. pronoun *innūn*, is unused in the nominative slot, it is more likely, as Rosenthal implies, that *himmōn* has become specialized in an accusative function to fill the gap in the otherwise defective pronominal suffix paradigm—as *hennūn* (“they,” subject) and *ennūn* (“them,” object) are similarly specialized in Syriac. The “odd” word order VOS, which is hard to account for by any syntactic or functional rule, then becomes explicable: The position of the object *himmōn* is governed by the rule of affixation, in which, of course, the pronominal object affix has the post-verbal position. The VOS sentences with *himmōn*, then, are to be construed as VS sentences.

b. Additional Note on Daniel 6: 25

It has been stated that *innūn* in Dan. 6: 25 is used as an object: *wa’amar malkā w^e haytīw gubrayyā ’illēk . . . u^kgōb ’aryāwāta r^emō ’innūn b^enēhon ur^ešēhon* (Bauer and Leander 1927: 70; Segert 1975: 321). It is certainly possible to read the sentence in this way: “The king commanded and they brought those men . . . and into the den of lions *they threw them*, their children and their wives.” But it is also possible to construe the last phrase as appositional or explicative, *r^emō* being read without an object, in the manner of a passive: “The king commanded and those men were brought . . . and into the den of lions were thrown—they, their children, and their wives.” (See the Revised Standard Version and Jerusalem Bible translations, as well as the Vulgate and Theodotion.) That the Masoretes read it this way is indicated by the disjunctive *zaqef qaton* over the *r^emō*. Such an interpretation would better preserve the consistency of the paradigm.

c. Sentential Complements Introduced by *dī*

Often, in sentences continuing verbs of cognition like *y^d*, “to know,” *hzy*, “to see,” or *šm^e*, “to hear,” the direct object slot in the sentence is filled by a verbal clause introduced by the particle *dī*, as in, for example, the following sentences:

Dan. 2: 8 *min-yaššīb yāda’ ’ānā dī ’iddānā ’antūn zāb^enīn*
 “Of a truth I know that you are buying time”

Dan. 4: 6 *’ānā yid’et dī rūāḥ ’elāhīn qaddišīn bāk*
 “I knew that a spirit of holy gods is in you”

Dan. 5: 16 *wa’ānā šim’et ’ālāk dī tikkul pišrīn t^emipšar*
 “I heard about you that you are able to make interpretations”

Dan. 5: 21 *y^eda’ dī šallī ’elāhā ’illā’ā b^emalkūt ’ānāša*
 “He knew that God Most High is ruler in the kingdom of man”

In other languages, such sentential complements are similarly extraposed, and this may reflect a general tendency of language. But in BA the tendency acquires an added motive from the multiple uses of the particle *dī*. It serves as a relative pronoun and a marker of the genitive, as well as its uses as a conjunction. Not only does it nominalize verbal/nominal clauses, as above, but it serves as an adverbial conjunction:

Dan. 2: 41 *wē dī ḥazaytā raglayyā . . . malkū p' līgā tehēwē*
 “and *whereas* you saw legs [and fingers partly of potter’s clay, partly of iron], the kingdom will be divided”

as a causal conjunction:

Dan. 6: 24 *kol ḥābāl lā' hišṣ' kaḥ bēh dī hēmīn bēlāhēh*
 “No damage was found on him, *because* he trusted in his God”

as introducing a final clause:

Dan. 4: 3 *uminnī šīm ē'ēm ḥan'ālā qodāmay ḥkol ḥakkīmē bābel dī p'sar ḥelmā y' ḥōd' 'unnāni*
 “I gave a command to bring before me all the sages of Babylon, *so that* they would tell me the interpretation of the dream”

Dan. 6: 18 *wē ḥatmah malka' b' 'izq' tēh . . . dī lā' tišnē ṣ' bū b' dānīyēl*
 “and the king sealed it with his seal ring . . . *lest* (lit. *so that not*) the purpose might change with Daniel”

as introducing direct discourse:

Dan. 2: 25 *wē kēn 'āmar lēh dī ḥaṣḥaḥat g' bar*
 “And he said this to him, ‘I have found a man’”

Given the multiplicity of uses of *dī*, to avoid ambiguity the language made use of certain clues to clarify the function of *dī* in the sentence. The most important clue was undoubtedly the word order. As noted above, all sentential complements introduced by *dī* are post-verbal. Evidently the Aramaic speaker or reader found it easier to perceive *dī* as governed by a verb of cognition in this position; in sentence- or clause-initial position (OSV or OVS) the ambiguity would be pervasive: a sentence like

dī rūaḥ 'ēlāhīn qaddīšīn bāk 'anā yid'ēi

could easily be misconstrued to mean “*because* the spirit of holy gods is in you, I knew . . .” or “*inasmuch as* the spirit of holy gods is in you, I knew . . .” Hence these constructions are excluded.

Likewise a construction like SOV, otherwise quite acceptable in DA, is excluded because of a possible perceptual “crash” of the relativizing functions of *dī*. A sentence like

malkā dī šallīṭ 'ēlāhā 'illā'ā b' malkūt 'anāša y' da'

changes not only the word order, but the entire meaning of the sentence; above it would read “The king, who is God Most High’s ruler in the kingdom of man, knew,” or possibly “The king of the ruler God Most High (?) . . . knew.” Hence, when *dī* nominalizes sentential objects, the VO word order is obligatory, when the verb is a verb of cognition.

4. WORD ORDER AND THE ROLE OF THE VERB

a. Word Order in Clauses Using the Suffix-Conjugation

The suffix conjugation (often called the “perfect”) in DA signifies, broadly speaking, past or completed action (Rosenthal 1974: 42). More exact specifications of tense or temporal action—perfect, pluperfect, narrative, and so on—have to be inferred from context.

Or so it has been assumed. An investigation of word order as it relates to the contextual usages of the suffix conjugation suggests that word order plays a role in differentiation of the different uses of the conjugation in the discourse. Specifically, there is a marked correlation of Verb-Object (VO) constructions with the *narrative* or *consecutive* use, while Object-Verb (OV) constructions are more frequently found with a *perfect/pluperfect* and *remote* (remote past, time-indifferent) signification.

A compelling example of this phenomenon is observable in a series of contrasting sentence pairs from Daniel 5.

Daniel 5: 2-4 (VO):

	'āmar bit'em ḥamrā kḥaytāyā kḥmānē dahābā wḥkaspā (...)
wḥ	yīštōn bḥhōn malkā wḥrabrḥbānōhī (...)
bedayin	haytīw mānē dahaba (...)
wḥ	'īštiw bḥhōn malkā wḥrabrḥbānōhī (...)
	'īštiw ḥamrā
wḥ	šabbahū lelāhē dahābā wḥkaspā (...)

“He_i [the king] said under the influence of wine to bring the
vessels of gold and silver (..)
that the king and his nobles might drink from them (...)
So then they brought the vessels of gold (...)
and the king and his nobles drank from them (...)
They drank wine
and they praised the gods of gold and silver (...)”

Daniel 5: 23 (OV):

. . . kḥmānāyā' dī baytēh	haytīw qodāmāk
wḥ'ant wḥrabrḥbānāik (...) ḥamrā	šāṭayin bḥhon
wḥlālāhē kaspā wḥdahābā (...)	šabbahū
wḥlālāhā (...) lā'	haddartā

... the vessels of his house they have brought before you
and you and your nobles (...) were drinking wine from them
and the gods of silver and gold (...) you have praised
but God (...) you have not glorified.

The first set of sentences represents the original narration of the events; the second, the recitation by Daniel of the same events. The relative positions of verb and object can be clearly discerned. This example

is particularly instructive, since the compared sentences are minimally differentiated except for the tense.

Lacking minimal pairs, but significant nonetheless, are the following examples of the suffix conjugation used as a perfect tense and displaying the OV word order.

1. *kol-melek rab wešallī millā* [OBJ.] *kidnā lā' še'el* [VB.] (**kol ḥarṭōm we'āšap . . .*)
2. (*dī*) *hokmē tā ugc būrtā* [OBJ.] *ṣḥabī* [VB.] *lī*
3. (*dī*) *millat malkā* [OBJ.] *hoda'tenā* [VB.]
4. *'ēlāh šmayyā malkūtā* [OBJ.] (...) *ṣḥab* [VB.] *lāk*
5. *b'nē 'ānāšā* [OBJ.] (...) *ṣḥab* [VB.] *bīdāk*
6. *hālā' gubrīn ṣlātā* [OBJ.] *ṣmēna* [VB.] (**gō nūrā nṣkappṣtīn*)
7. *hālā' 'ēsār* [OBJ.] *ṣsamtā* [VB.]
8. *qodāmāk malka ḥābūlā* [OBJ.] *lā' 'abdēt* [VB.]

Translation

1. Dan. 2: 10: “No great and mighty king *has ever asked* such a thing (of any magician ...)”
2. Dan. 2: 23: “For you *have given* me wisdom and strength”
3. Dan. 2: 23: “For you *have made known* to us the affair of the king”
4. Dan. 2: 37: “The God of Heaven *has given* the kingdom to you”
5. Dan. 2: 38: “He *has given* . . . humanity into your hand”
6. Dan. 3: 24: “*Didn't we throw* three men bound into the fire?”
7. Dan. 6: 13: “*Didn't you sign* a decree?”
8. Dan. 6: 23: “Before thee, O king, I *have done* nothing wrong ”

That we may speak here only of a trend, not a rule, is proved by sentences where one would expect, by the proposed rule, to find OV word order instead of VO (see Dan. 2:25, 5: 22, 5: 26). In general, however, the correlation between the OV word order and predicates notionally perfect or pluperfect is very strong. In main clauses the exceptions are few; but in relative clauses—as we shall see—the tendency does not obtain at all.

Sentences not notionally perfect/pluperfect, nor yet narrative-consecutive, but which summarize or describe events (non-sequentially) that took place in the distant past—hence remote—also have the OV word order. Note for instance the “regressive” position of the verbs in Daniel’s speech in 5:18, 20-21 describing the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar. (See also 4:15a, 5:11b, 5:22b.)

The chart below graphically lays out the distribution of word order types with the perfect-remote use of the suffix conjugation:

Perfective (P)-Remote (R) (excludes objects beginning with <i>dī</i> and relative clauses)		VO	OV	Perfective (P)-Remote (R) (excludes objects beginning with <i>dī</i> and relative clauses)		VO	OV
2:10c	(P)		+	5:18a	(R)		+
2:23a	(P)		+	5:20d	(R)		+
2:23d	(P)		+	5:21b	(R)		+
2:25c	(P)	+		5:22a	(P)	+	
2:37c	(P)		+	5:22b	(R)		+
2:38a	(P)		+	5:23b	(P)		+
3:24c	(P)		+	5:26a	(P)	+	
3:28d	(R)		+	6:13b	(P)		+
4:15a	(P)		+	6:23e	(P)		+

Let us return to the narrative-consecutive use of the suffix conjugation. The first group of sentences from Daniel 5 listed above—the narrative—all have the VO word order; the hypothesis is that this set of minimal sentence pairs is paradigmatic for the relation between the notional meaning of perfect-pluperfect and narrative-consecutive. The correlation is, again, very strong.

The use of the suffix-conjugation in VO sentences to express temporal sequence is visible also in a species of conjoined sentences common in DA—the conjunction of a command (a) and the result of the command (b). The sentence of result, necessarily conceived as temporally posterior to the sentence of command, would have the VO word order, under the proposed hypothesis; and that is what we find. Some examples:

- Dan. 5: 29 (a) *bēdayin 'āmar Bēlšazzar*
 (b) *wehalbīsū k Dānīyēl 'argewānā wehamnīka ...*
wehaktīzū 'alōhī dī lehēwē šallū ...

“Then Belshazzar commanded
 and they caused Daniel to wear purple and a necklace
 and they cried concerning him that he would be ruler”

- Dan. 6: 17a (a) *bēdayin malkā 'āmar*
 (b) *wehaytīw k Dānīyēl uwmō k gubbā dī 'aryāwātā*

“Then the king commanded
 and they brought Daniel and threw [him] into the lions’ den”

- Dan. 6: 25 (a) *wa'āmar malkā*
 (b) *wehaytīw gubrayyā 'illēk*

“Then the king commanded
 and they brought those men . . . ”

All of these examples exhibit the VO order in the second sentence. Bauer and Leander (1927: 351-352) compare this to a similar phenomenon in Arabic in which, after verbs of command, the content of the command is not generally given in a dependent clause, but is attached with *waw* like the execution of the command.

In other words, according to Bauer and Leander, sentences such as *'āmar malkā wehaytīw k Dānīyēl* are transforms of *'āmar malkā k haytāyā k Dānīyēl*. However, a sentence like Dan. 6:24a tells against this:

- Dan. 6:24 (a) *k Dānīyēl 'āmar [malkā] k hansāqā min gubbā*
 (b) *wehussaḡ Dānīyēl min gubbā*

“The king commanded to draw Daniel from the pit
 and Daniel was drawn from the pit”

—as Bauer and Leander themselves note (1927: 352; see also as above, Dan. 5:2-3.) A sentence like *'āmar malkā wehaytīw k Dānīyēl*, instead of a transform of *'āmar malkā k haytāyā k Dānīyēl*, looks instead like a transform of *'āmar malkā k haytāyā k Dānīyēl wehaytīw k Dānīyēl*, the infinitive being deleted to avoid redundancy.

All of the above sentences involve a command or wish, and the verb is typically an indefinite plural or passive. But this type of clause coordination is not limited to such sentences, as witness Daniel’s request in 2:49:

- (a) *wē Dāniyel bē'ā min mālkā*
 (b) *umanni' 'al 'abīdā . . . šadrāk mēsāk wa'abēd rēgō*
 “Daniel made a request of the king
 and he appointed over the work . . . Shadrach *et al.*”

See also these similar sentences within narrative contexts:

- Dan. 3: 28 (a) *dī šēlah' mal'ākēh*
 (b) *wēšēzīb k'abdōhī*
 “who sent his angel
 and (thereby) saved his servants”
- Dan. 6:23 (a) *'ēlāhī šēlah' mal'ākēh*
 (b) *ūšgar pum 'aryāwātā*
 “My God sent his angel
 and closed the mouth of the lions”

Relative clauses in general do not seem to be covered by the suggested word-order paradigm, and will be discussed below. First, however, we present a chart showing graphically the correlations spoken of above.

Narrative-Consecutive (excludes objects beginning with <i>dī</i> and relative clauses)			Narrative-Consecutive (excludes objects beginning with <i>dī</i> and relative clauses)		
	OV	VO		OV	VO
2:13b		+	5:1a		+
2:14a		+	5:3a		+
2:15c	+		5:4a		+
2:17b	+		5:29b		+
2:19b		+	6:1a		+
2:25a		+	6:2a		+
2:34b		+	6:10a		+
2:35f		+	6:12b		+
2:45b		+	6:15c		+
2:48a	+		6:17b		+
2:48b	+		6:19c	+	
2:49b		+	6:23a		+
3:1a		+	6:23b		+
3:28b		+	6:25b		+
3:28d	+		6:25f	+	
3:28e		+	7:1a	+	
4:2a	+		7:1b	+	
4:20a		+	7:1c	+	
4:31a	+		7:12a		+
4:31c	+		7:22d	+	
4:31d	+		7:28c	+	

As with the OV word order in “perfect”-type clauses, the VO order in temporal sequence clauses is not an infrangible rule, but simply a noteworthy tendency. There are some interesting features of the “exceptions” 2:48b, 3:28d, 6:19c, 6:25f. They may be construed as *circumstantial clauses in the past* and therefore not truly consecutive. In English they would be translated as follows:

- Dan. 2:48b *'ēdayin malkā k Dānīyēl rabbī*
matē nān rabrē bān saggi'ān yēhab lēh
 “Then the king magnified Daniel,
 giving him many great gifts”
- Dan. 3:28 *dī hūrē hiṣū 'alōhī*
ūmillat malkā sannīw
 “For they trusted in him,
 changing the king's order”
- Dan. 6:19c *ūbāt rēwāt*
wēdaḥwān lā' han'ēl qōdāmōhī
 “He spent the night fasting,
 having no victuals [*sic* Theodotion] brought to him”
- Dan. 6:25f *'ad dī š'liṭū b'hōn 'aryāwātā*
wēkol garmēhōn haddiqū
 “(until) the lions mastered them,
 crushing all their bones”

Other exceptions are Dan. 2:15a (OVS!), 2:17b, 2:48ab, 4:31, 7:1 (three times), 7:28c. I offer them as exceptions, but it can be noted that the sentences in 2:48, 4:31, and 7:28 all resume the main thread of narrative after an extended subsection, and perhaps for this reason, the tight temporal-sequence constraint is weakened.

The sentences beginning Chapter 7 are truly anomalous, however, especially considering that several sentences beginning a new narrative are (S)VO, not SOV (i.e., 3:1, 5:1, 6:1).

b. The Objects of Infinitive Complements

Of the six possible arrangements of Verb (V), Infinitive Complement (C), and Object (O), only three—VCO, VOC, and OVC—are actually found in DA. The infinitive, as a verbal complement governed by a main verb, comes as a rule after that verb. The tense of the main verb also seems to determine the place of the object of the complement with respect to the complement; that is, the same constraints seem to be operating in V/C/O constructions as in V/O. The most notable correlation here is that of the suffix conjugation narrative-consecutive tense with the VCO order; see Dan. 2:12, 3:2, 3:13, 3:19, 3:20, 4:3, 5:2, 5:7, 6:8 versus 2:46, 6:5, 6:24. (For a complete list of infinitives with objects, see Baumgartner, 1927: 121.)

	VCO (OC)	VOC (OC)	OVC (OC)	(OC)
Suffix-Conj. Perfect	1	-	2	(2)
Suffix-Conj. Narr.	9	1	2	(3)
Prefix-Conjug.	1	1	3	(4)
Participles	1	4	3	(7)
Relatives	3	-	-	(-)

I can see no obvious reason for the interposing of the object between the verb and the infinitive complement.

c. Word Order in Clauses Using the Prefix-Conjugation

The prefix conjugation almost uniformly appears in main clauses with the OV word order, regardless of the aspectual use made of the conjugation. (For discussion of aspect/tense in DA, see H. Rosen, 1963: 183. It will be obvious to those familiar with the literature that Rosen and I differ in our interpretation of the tenses of Daniel. Rather than engage now in an elaborate justification of my thesis *vis-à-vis* Rosen's, however, I have chosen to let the material I have collected speak for itself.) Again, this does not apply to relative clauses.

A chart of the occurrences in main clauses:

Prefix-Conjugation (excludes objects beginning with <i>dī</i> and relative clauses)	VO	OV	Prefix-Conjugation (excludes objects beginning with <i>dī</i> and relative clauses)	VO	OV
2:4c		+	5:7d		+
2:5a	+		5:12d		+
2:6a		+	5:16e		+
2:7a		+	5:17c		+
2:7b		+	5:21c		+
2:9a		+	6:9a	+	
2:24b		+	6:9b	+	
2:24d		+	7:9b		+
2:30b		+	7:18a	+	
2:30c		+	7:18b	+	
4:13a	+		7:23c	+	
4:14c		+	7:24d		+
4:22b		+	7:25a		+
4:30c		+	7:25b		+
5:7c		+	7:26b		+

If we look at the uses of the suffix and prefix conjugation with the several word orders together, the following picture emerges: when the writer wishes to describe a sequence of events, whether in narrative or otherwise, the VO construction is preferred. If the writer departs from the sequential time-line to describe a previous action (perfect/pluperfect), contemporaneous action (circumstantial), or future action, the OV construction is preferred.

This state of affairs possibly provides a concrete illustration of the theories of Paul Hopper on the properties of "foregrounding" and "backgrounding" in discourse. In his paper "Aspect and Foregrounding in Discourse," he says:

It is evidently a universal of narrative discourse that in any extended text an overt distinction is made between the language of supportive material which does not itself narrate the main events. . . . The difference between the sentences in the foreground (the "main line" events) and the ones in the background . . . has to do with sequentiality. The foregrounded events succeed one another in the narrative in the same order as their succession in the real world; it is in other words an iconic order. The backgrounded events, on the other hand, are not in sequence to the foregrounded events, but are concurrent with them. [Hopper: 213, 214]

If a language does not have a morphological option to differentiate foreground and background, says Hopper, it may resort to other means:

The foreground-background distinction may be shown in ways other than morphology. For example, the ordinary uninterrupted flow of the narrative in foreground may elicit a different word order from the “intervening” descriptive syntax of backgrounding. . . . In this strategy, it is the position of the verb which is crucial. The verb is the location of new, narrative-advancing information. [239]

In Aramaic, with its sparse inflection for tense-aspect, the word order was clearly the point at which to draw the distinction.

d. Relative Clauses

As noted above, the order we have described as normal for the suffix and prefix conjugation does not obtain in the relative clause: instead of the expected OV order, we generally have the VO order (see Dan. 2:35, 3:12, 3:22, 3:38, 5:12, 6:25 for examples using the suffix conjugation; 3:5, 3:10, 3:29, 5:7, 5:15, 5:29, 6:8 for the prefix conjugation). I believe that the reason, as with the sentence complements described above, lies in the multifold uses of the particle *dī*. If the introduction of *dī* to form a relative clause would lead to an ambiguity or a perceptual crash with other uses of *dī*, the word order is changed to eliminate the ambiguity. Consider, for instance, this phrase from Dan. 3:5:

bē'iddānā dī tišnē'ūn qāl qarnā . . .

“When (lit. *at the time that*) you hear the sound of the horn . . .”

With the prefix conjugation, the expected word order would be *qāl qarnā tišnē'ūn*. But if the sentence read

bē'iddānā dī qāl qarnā . . . tišnē'ūn . . .

a disorientation, however momentary, might be introduced by an initial reading of *bē'iddānā dī qāl qarnā* as a noun phrase.

On the other hand, when no ambiguity or disorientation is caused by the *dī*, the clause assumes its normal order, as in, for instance, Dan. 2:9:

'inda' dī pišrēh ʾhahāwūnnanī

“I'll know that you will tell me its meaning”

Since *dī* after a verb from the root *yd'* could signify nothing other than a relative clause, the word order with the prefix-conjugation verb is the expected OV. Note also that when the noun being modified is long enough or complex enough to preclude or render unlikely its inclusion in a noun phrase, the ambiguity is sufficiently reduced to allow the normal word order to appear. For instance, in Dan. 2:5:

g'bar min b'nē gālūtā dī y'hūd dī pišrā k'malkā y'hōda'

“a man from the Judean captives who will make known the meaning to the king”

Or in Dan. 5:15:

hu'allū qodāmay hakkīmayyā 'āšpayyā dī k'tābā k'nā yiqrōn

“wise men and sages were brought before me who could read the writing”

The disambiguating change of word order is prominent in a group of sentences containing decrees of the king, which have the form *kol NOUN dī VERB OBJECT*:

Dan. 3:10 *kol 'ēnāš dī yišma' qāl qarnā . . .*

“Everyone who hears the sound of the horn . . .”

Dan. 3:29 *kol 'am 'ummā wəliššān dī yēmar šalū . . .*

“Any people, nation, or tongue who speaks slander . . .”

Dan. 5:7 *kol 'ēnāš dī yiqrē kə tābā ūpišrēh yəḥawwinnanī . . .*

“Anyone who reads the writing and tells the meaning . . .”

(Note in this example that, in the second clause, after the form of the clause has been established, the order reverts to the more normal OV.)

Dan. 6:8 *kol dī yib'ē ba'ū . . .*

“Anyone who makes a request . . .”

And in Ezra 6:11:

kol 'ēnāš dī yəḥašnē pitgāmā . . .

“Anyone who changes this decree . . .”

e. Participles

In general, participles have the VO word order (Dan. 2:8, 2:20-22, 2:40, 3:7, 3:25, 3:27, 4:34, 5:5, 5:12, 6:3, 6:28, 7:2, 7:8, 7:21), as would be expected if the participle is primarily a narrative tense (Rosen, 1963: 185). But sometimes the OV order is found as well (2:8, 2:23, 4:4, 5:1, 5:23, 7:7, 7:20). I can detect no obvious constraining factor on the word order of sentences using participle. The place of the participle, in the Biblical Aramaic verbal system, remains obscure—*pace* Rosen—since it seems to be used as a present (e.g., 3:25) and a perfect (e.g., 5:23), as well as a narrative tense. The subject requires further investigation.

f. Imperatives

There is hardly enough material to justify any kind of definite statement on word order in clauses using the imperative. The VO word order (e.g., 2:4, 4:11 [five times], 6:16, 7:5) is just as frequent as the OV (2:6, 2:9, 4:6, 4:12, 4:15, 4:24, 5:17). My impression is that the OV is more formal, but it is impossible to say definitely.

5. CONCLUSION

The following is a standard view of the place of word order in the study of Semitic syntax:

Syntax, the relationships of words to one another, forms together with morphology the material of grammar. Its relative importance varies according the language considered. This is particularly true in the case of word order, and may be illustrated by languages as different structurally as Sanskrit and Chinese. The former, a highly inflected language, allows great freedom in the order of words, since case endings make the functions of words abundantly clear. On the other hand, Chinese has no inflections, and consequently the word order assumes a prime importance and becomes inflexible; position is the key to the understanding of a Chinese sentence. When an inflected language loses its case endings, as English did, then word order and the increased use of prepositions assume the functions of the former cases. That is why the two statements *the man hit the boy* and *the boy hit the man* have diametrically opposite meanings. Hebrew is in a similar position to English, having early lost its case endings, and so depending largely on position for grammatical function. It is unfortunate that the significance of word order in Hebrew has not been fully appreciated by grammarians. [Williams, 1976: 3]

Whatever is the validity of these remarks with regard to Hebrew—and I do not think they are valid—they are clearly wrong applied to the Aramaic of Daniel. It also has lost its case endings, and thereby, ostensibly, its word function markers. And yet the word order of an Aramaic sentence is far from rigid. In this respect it could not differ more from such languages as English and Chinese.

One might also note the curious fact that the Semitic languages with the most fully-orbed and productive system of case endings, i.e., Akkadian and Arabic (in their classical stages) also have a marked preference for a particular word order (SOV and VSO, respectively). One might simply explain this as “noise,” a redundancy that later stages of the language, or colloquial forms, did away with. But however it is dealt with it might indicate that word order is not tied to inflectional marking, or vice versa.

It is obvious, indeed, that DA has a repertoire of word orders that fulfill certain functions—sometimes, it is true, to reduce ambiguity—in the discourse. Compared to Hebrew, its word order is remarkably free, although both languages have a comparable set of devices to reduce ambiguity.

One of them, of course, is the meaning of the words of the sentence. From the standpoint of word order, the sentence

Dan. 2:15 *'ēdayin milk'tā hōda' 'aryōk k Dānīyēl*

then the-word told Arioch to-Daniel
 “Then Arioch told the word to Daniel”

is unusual. But it could hardly be construed as “The word told Arioch . . .,” since the root *yḏ'* is used only with human, or anthropomorphized, subjects.

Another disambiguating device is number-gender concord. The sentence used above is unambiguous not only because of its lexical components, but because the verb *hōda'* agrees in gender with *'aryōk* and not with *milk'tā*.

Such features of Aramaic grammar leave the language free to use word order for other purposes. One result of the present study is to suggest that the VO word order was specialized in the suffix conjugation to mark or signal temporal sequence or consecution. Such a specialization would prove useful in a phase of the language that had developed two different uses for the same tense paradigm.

It will not have been lost upon the Hebraist that such a fronting of the verb is analogous in some ways to the Biblical Hebrew *wāw*-consecutive, in which the verb is necessarily at the front of the sentence. Possibly in Hebrew a similar process was at work to differentiate the preterite—identical with the imperfect throughout much of its paradigm and wholly identical with the jussive—by placing it (or leaving it) at the

head of the sentence. If so, the process was carried out more thoroughly and far earlier in Hebrew than in Aramaic, the verbal system of which was exposed to more intense influences from outside and for a longer period; the result, in Aramaic, is an extremely diverse picture of the tense system throughout all the dialects. It is also possible that Hebrew may actually have influenced DA directly with the result of the word order differentiation described above.

Of course, we cannot speak of "rules" here, especially since we are dealing with a literary text, and the literary form of a language delights in breaking rules. Still, the trends and preferences that can be discerned in this study are real and significant. The next logical task, in view of the affinities of Daniel with Eastern Aramaic and the enormous amount of material available in the dialects of Syriac and Talmudic Aramaic, is to carry the study further into these later types of the language. The great number of texts available should make for more definite conclusions on the history of Aramaic word order and contribute to our knowledge of the development of the Aramaic verbal system.

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